

Research  
Based  
Curricula

Does consciousness have  
a body?

Key Stage 5 Philosophy

Resource 6

2019



# Resource Six Overview



Topic	The notion of flesh and the embodied mind
A-Level Modules	Supra-curricular content
Objectives	<p>After completing this resource you should be able:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ To develop an understanding of the notion of "flesh" in Merleau-Ponty's writings</li><li>✓ To explore how "flesh" completes and extends Merleau-Ponty's thesis on the incarnate consciousness</li><li>✓ To evaluate how the idea of flesh is used in different fields of knowledge (through further reading)</li></ul>
Instructions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Read the data source</li><li>2. Complete the activities</li><li>3. Explore the further reading</li></ol>
Context	<p>In "The Visible and the Invisible", Merleau-Ponty develops his ontology of flesh in a stand-alone chapter entitled "The Intertwining-The Chiasm" as the culmination of all his philosophical considerations. Chiasm is a crisscrossing or a bi-directional becoming or exchange between the body and things that justifies speaking of "flesh" of things, a kinship between the sensing body and sensed things that makes their communication possible. Flesh in this sense is the union of the sensible and the idea, body and consciousness, a notion that does not correspond to any traditional philosophical concept, but is closest to the notion of an "element" in the classical sense.</p>

# Resource Six

## Data Source



### The Logic of the Chiasm in Merleau-Ponty's Early Philosophy

Muller, Robin (2017).  
Ergo, An Open Access  
Journal Of  
Philosophy, 4(20181115)

After the publication of *Phenomenology of Perception*, a problem became decisive for Merleau-Ponty. As he tells us in a Working Note from 1959, "the problems posed in *PhP* are insoluble because I start there from the 'consciousness'- 'object' distinction" (VI:200/250). To begin again, he needs to locate the common ground from which the subject-object division emerges, accounting, at the same time, for the primitive divergence within this ground that allows the division to take shape.



The tension between these demands gives rise to the concept Merleau-Ponty first makes use of in 1951 the concept of "flesh." With "flesh," Merleau-Ponty describes a basic ontological structure that hitherto "has no name in any philosophy" (VI:139, 147/181, 190) because philosophy has been caught on one side or another of the antinomy that flesh is meant to resolve. To name and to develop this concept is therefore to respond to the question of the relation of the human being and the world, the object, or nature without presupposing a specific account of their difference.



The term "flesh" appears for the first time in "Man and Adversity"(1951) in which Merleau-Ponty refers to "the notion of flesh, that is, animate body" (S:227/287). "Flesh," therefore, calls to mind what Merleau-Ponty names the philosophical advancement of "our century": that philosophy has succeeded in "wip[ing] out the dividing line between 'body' and 'mind,' and sees human life as through and through mental [spirituelle] and corporeal" (S:227/287). Whereas in *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty spoke of the body as a "fabric into which all objects are woven," and as "the general instrument of my 'understanding'" (*PhP*:244/282), the emphasis on the flesh of the body brings out its living aspect. The body is not an instrument that my conscious processes could take hold of, it is an "intertwining of vision and movement" (EM:124/20) that is in and of the world.

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## Data Source



By invoking this double (rhetorical and biological) sense of a crossing, Merleau-Ponty implies that flesh is not simply a carnal "thickness" that is shared by myself and world; it is an overlapping or "folding back" of one on the other that functions as the pre-condition of thought (VI:152/197). Already in the 1930s and 1940s, Merleau-Ponty links the chiasmic structure of the mind-body to the reciprocity of that body and world. By the time of *The Visible and the Invisible*, however, the development of the notion of flesh as Gallagher and Zahavi's notice, shows the centrality of "the notion of an embodied mind or a minded body" in Merleau-Ponty's thought (2012: 153).

EM = Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1994/1964). *Eye and Mind*. In Galen Johnson (Ed.) and Michael Smith (Trans.), *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader* (35–56). Northwestern University Press / *L'Œil et L'Esprit*. Gallimard.

PhP = Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2012/1945). *Phenomenology of Perception* (Donald A. Landes, Trans). Routledge. / *Phénoménologie de la Perception*. Gallimard.

S = Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964/1960). *Signs* (Richard C. McCleary, Trans.). Northwestern University Press. / *Signes*. Gallimard.

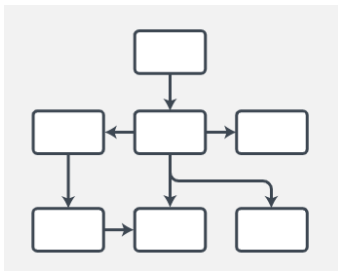
VI = Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968/1964). *The Visible and the Invisible* (Alphonso Lingis, Trans.). / *Le Visible et L'Invisible*. Gallimard.

Gallagher, Shaun and Dan Zahavi (2012). *The Phenomenological Mind* (2nd. ed.). Routledge.

# Resource Six Activities



## Activities



A concept map is a diagram that depicts suggested relationships. Most concept maps depict ideas as boxes or circles (also called nodes), which are structured hierarchically and connected with lines or arrows (also called arcs). These lines are labelled with linking words and phrases to help explain the connections between concepts.

1. Using the text, can you create a concept map in which you explore how the idea of flesh can be extended in other domains of human knowledge?



- Tip: Before beginning your concept map, it can be helpful to come up with a list identifying the key concepts that need to be included.

2. What might the implications be of the extensions in your concept map?

- Tip: Get inspired from further reading!

3. Merleau-Ponty developed his notion of flesh inspired from the experiences of painter Paul Cézanne. Watch "Cezanne and Merleau Ponty"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRM6ubTGxco>



# Resource Six Further Reading



**Explore** Explore an “ecological” account of the idea of flesh

<https://sensualanimator.com/2012/04/13/phenomenology-of-perception-maurice-merleau-ponty/>





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